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STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: PREL PTER PHUM ELAB MOPS KU

SUBJECT: NEW MINISTER OF INTERIOR AND DEFENSE ON
COUNTERTERRORISM, EXPAT LABOR ABUSE

REF: KUWAIT 490

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (c)

¶1. (C) The Ambassador met with First Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior (MOI) and Minister of Defense (MOD), Shaykh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on February 14 to congratulate him on his appointment as Interior Minister. Shaykh Jaber, already Minister of Defense since 2001, was installed as Interior Minister when the new Cabinet was announced February 8. The meeting focused on increasing the level of counterterrorism resources and support provided by the GOK as well as improving labor conditions for domestics, an issue under MOI's control rather than Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

Counterterrorism

¶2. (C) Echoing his remarks published in Sunday February 11's local press (reftel), the newly installed First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and Minister of Defense Shaykh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on February 14 told the Ambassador that the fight against terrorism needed to shift from ministries simply exchanging information to analyzing the same information. Acknowledging that his tenure as Interior Minister has been very short, Shaykh Jaber stated that the fight against terrorism affected every area of government and terrorism spreads for "very specific reasons," reasons that have to be addressed by all ministries. Agreeing with the Ambassador that special attention must be paid to any support going to insurgents in Iraq, attacking U.S. forces, Shaykh Jaber admitted that the same type of attack "could happen right here." He went on to say that there was room for improvement in the CT relationship and accepted the Ambassador's call to review the amount of resources allocated for CT. The Ambassador thanked the Minister for the support provided to protect U.S. troops in Kuwait.

Labor

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador raised the issue of better protection for expatriate laborers and domestics. Shaykh Jaber, a former Minister of Social Affairs and Labor from 1986-1988, told the Ambassador that the problem lay with "individuals and some companies" but that he was "fully aware" of the problems. Noting that in the past, laborers used to dine with their Kuwaiti family sponsors, Shaykh Jaber said he would work to ensure better enforcement of labor laws already on the books. He added that he had just met with the Bangladeshi Ambassador and there was concern that the

Bangladeshi workers in particular, suffered more due to their poor educational backgrounds and high rate of illiteracy. The Interior Minister then assured the Ambassador that he "would see improvement" and that Kuwaitis "do not accept" the mistreatment of workers, since before the economy was good, Kuwaitis themselves previously did the work that is now done by expatriates. The Ambassador noted that improvements in legal protection and provision of temporary shelters for domestics would go a long way toward alleviating the problem.

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LeBaron